

GRUBER AWARD

2008 Winner: SFC Fernando Pharr, 4-27 FA

Sergeant First Class (SFC) Fernando Pharr, Master Gunner for the 4th Battalion, 27th Field Artillery (4-27 FA), Baumholder, Germany, is the 2008 Gruber Award Winner.

The Gruber Award was established in 2002 to recognize outstanding individual thought and innovation that results in significant contributions to or the enhancement of the FA's warfighting capabilities, morale, readiness or maintenance. It is named after Brigadier General Edmund L. Gruber, 1979-1941, who, as a first lieutenant in 1908, composed the *Caisson Song* that the Army adapted as *The Army Goes Rolling Along* in 1952. (For more information, see "Knox, Hamilton and Gruber Awards" link on <http://sill-www.army.mil/awards/default.htm>.)

4-27 FA began the arduous task of re-setting its FA batteries in the summer of 2007. During this time and beyond, Pharr demonstrated the true value of a master gunner. He tackled tough, demanding positions, allowing the command to meet demanding readiness standards despite

key leadership shortages. Since Pharr's selection as 4-27 FA's Master Gunner, he has endeavored to reestablish the unit's Artillery skills that had diminished drastically due to multiple nonstandard missions in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF).

He simultaneously held the battalion operations sergeant and master gunner positions, leading the operations section through gunnery rotations and mission readiness exercises with outstanding results, gaining the full confidence of the command team in the process.

Reset. Pharr helped transform the unit back into an Artillery battalion capable of meeting the requirements of providing accurate and predictable fires. He ensured that all junior leaders of the battalion's gun sections, fire direction crews and forward observer teams received necessary training for their continued professional growth. He convinced the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, and US Army Europe (USAEUR) leaderships to support a mobile training team (MTT) Basic NCO Course (BNCOC) at Baumholder, Germany, for the unit's Artillerymen. This training became the catalyst that helped the battalion meet all Artillery-related requirements necessary to go to war.

During the trainup for the pending deployment in support of OIF 07-09, he devised a training model that effectively trained, certified and qualified all 18 gun sections. He ensured that the battalion trained on the tactics, techniques and procedures (TTP) most suited to a counterinsurgency, focusing on increased accuracy; and he coached and mentored platoon sergeants and platoon leaders on the finer points of employing their weapon systems.

In counterinsurgency, FA battalions must be adaptable, provide lethal and accurate fires, and be able to maneuver and fight as motorized rifle battalions. Pharr and his team understood this reality and prepared the battalion for success. As a graduate of the USAREUR Small Arms Master Marksman Course, he introduced light Infantry TTP to the unit. This training—and his recommendation that the battalion host the Fort Sill, Oklahoma, FA Master Gunner

Department sponsored Small Arms Optics MTT—prepared the battalion for its maneuver mission.

Deployment. His technical knowledge and tactical expertise played a critical role in deploying 100 percent of the battalion from Baumholder, Germany, to Camp Buehring, Kuwait, and finally to Baghdad, Iraq. When the battalion had an officer shortage, the commander selected Pharr to fill the battle captain position—a job traditionally held by seasoned captains. He was tasked with running a maneuver task force consisting of three maneuver companies and an Artillery battery in an operational environment (OE) that previously required the commitment of three battalion task forces (TFs).

After arriving in Central Command's area of responsibility and almost immediately upon entering its OE, 4-27 FA (TF Thunder) was ordered to provide fire support in the mission that would be the undoing of al Qaeda's influence in the Diyala Province. Ordered to move from its static firing positions and into the open, hostile terrain of Iraq, Pharr spearheaded the advance-party element that set, selected and prepared the gun position serving as the firebase in support of Operation Iron Pursuit. Pharr's expertise was essential to the battalion's readiness to fire well before the operation's execution hour—four hours earlier than planned.

Pharr worked with multiple in-theater field service representatives to ensure that all of the battalion's firing systems were intact and mission capable. These efforts proved crucial when the battalion fired its first XM982 Excalibur round, destroying an enemy vehicle that served as an improvised explosive device cache. Until that time, the enemy was using this cache, severely hampering the brigade's freedom of movement along a vital route.

This mission and successful firings in hundreds of other missions in support of 2nd BCT are due in large part to the confidence, ability and professionalism that Pharr instilled in the firing elements. Training is the key to combat performance, and Pharr's training efforts put the battalion in the best possible position for mission success.



SFC Fernando Pharr, Master Gunner for the 4th Battalion, 27th Field Artillery (4-27 FA), prepares to use the aiming circle to verify a Paladin's data at Combat Observation Post Carver, Iraq. (Photo courtesy of 4-27 Public Affairs Office)